

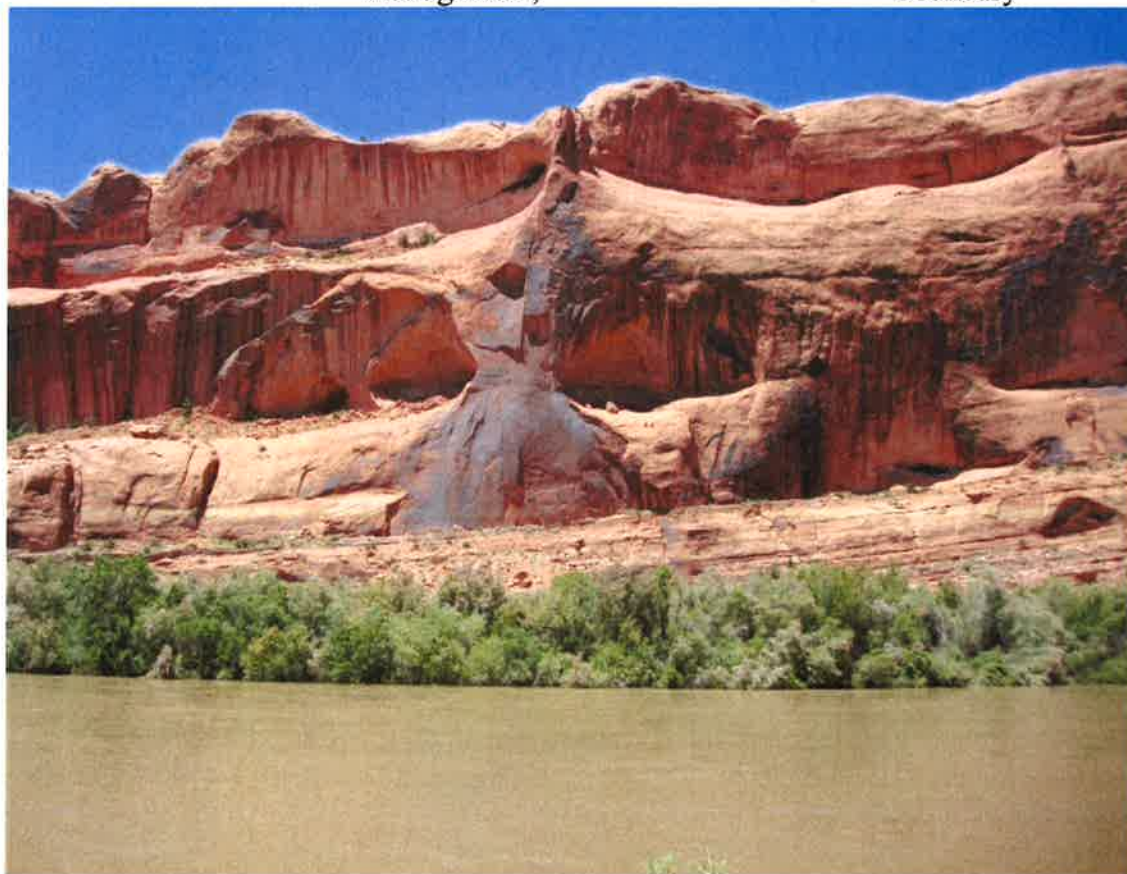
United States Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management

Decision Record
Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-UT-Y010-2015-0190-EA

August, 2016

Moab Field Office Programmatic Invasive Species Management Plan

Location: Bureau of Land Management, Within Moab Field Office Boundary



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The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has conducted an environmental analysis and documented it in an environmental assessment (EA) number DOI-BLM-UT-Y010-2015-0190-EA. The proposed action addresses invasive species reduction, vegetative restoration, and resource protection efforts in the Moab Field Office in Grand and San Juan County, Utah. The project was needed to reduce the adverse impacts associated with noxious and invasive weeds on BLM-administered lands within the office boundary. The proposed Programmatic Invasive Species Management Plan (PISMP) also provides a mechanism for evaluating a range of treatment options or combination of options to eradicate, control, contain, or prevent weed infestations. In addition, BLM resources may be used to treat Federal and adjacent non-Federal lands for activities that benefit resources on Federal Land.

Decision: I have decided to select Alternative A as analyzed in the above referenced EA. With that alternative the Fuels Program for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Canyon Country Fire Zone (CYFZ) and Moab Field Office (MFO) propose to implement a Programmatic Invasive Species Management Plan within approximately 2,856,082 acres of land within the Moab Field Office Boundary utilizing several different treatment methods. Targeted noxious weeds, invasive species and undesirable species would be controlled by implementing an integrated invasive plant management plan (combined use of preventative, mechanical, chemical, manual, prescribed fire, and biological measures). Invasive plant control would be accomplished by implementing long-term integrated invasive plant control along major rivers, drainages, roads, and uplands within the MFO to reduce invasive plant spread, decrease infestations, and control populations; thereby enabling greater function of ecological processes.

Future proposed treatments would be located within the analysis area. Future treatments within the analysis area would provide treatment type and location information as it becomes available and additional NEPA compliance would be completed prior to implementation by completing a Decision of NEPA adequacy (DNA) document. This information would be added to the ePlanning website and administrative record to ensure the public is kept informed and records are kept for all projects tiering to this programmatic EA.

Authorities: The authority for this decision is contained in 43 CFR Ch. II (Revised as of October 1, 2008); Subpart 4190—Effects of Wildfire Management Decisions; § 4190.1 Effects of wildfire management decisions.

(a) Notwithstanding the provisions of 43 CFR 4.21(a)(1), when BLM determines that vegetation, soil, or other resources on the public lands are at substantial risk of wildfire due to drought, fuels buildup, or other reasons, or at immediate risk of erosion or other damage due to wildfire, BLM may make a rangeland wildfire management decision effective immediately or on a date established in the decision.

Wildfire management includes but is not limited to:

(1) Fuel reduction or fuel treatment such as prescribed burns and mechanical, chemical, and biological thinning methods (with or without removal of thinned materials); and (2) Projects to stabilize and rehabilitate lands affected by wildfire.

Compliance and Monitoring: Effectiveness monitoring on post treatments would be conducted through such methods as photograph points, noted observations, riparian assessments, GPS mapping, and/or long-term trend monitoring. This would be done to help determine whether treatments were or were not effective, if integrated invasive plant management activities occurred as expected, detect whether Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were appropriately applied, and to help ensure the goals and objectives outlined in Section 2.2 are achieved. Long-term vegetative trend monitoring of established studies would be conducted every 3 to 5 years by the BLM, as funding and workloads allows, insuring soils, upland sites, riparian, and resource objectives are documented. Trend studies consist of recording the frequency of occurrence for plant species, including invasive plants, vegetative composition, and percent ground cover.

Monitoring would be utilized as a tool in determining the effectiveness of integrated invasive plant management strategies, size of infestations, and rate of control. This information would be used to adjust treatment options, if needed, to make efficient and effective use of time and resources in controlling invasive plants.

Monitoring would be conducted prior to, during and after completion of the project, and follow-up maintenance would be scheduled contingent upon monitoring results. Treatment methods, design and implementation would adhere to CYFZ fuels programs Standard Operation Procedures (SOP's), Best Management Practices (BMP's) and/or the MFO Resource Management Plan (RMP).

Terms / Conditions / Stipulations: Specific terms, conditions and stipulations would apply to this project:

(1) Contracts utilized for BLM work include specific language to prevent the pollution of air, soil and/or water through contracted operations; along with a cleanup and/or restoration clause in the event that operations or equipment failure or other actions by the contractor, contracted employees and/or representatives result in the pollution of public lands. Contract language also defines a "hazardous substance," specifies a "reportable quantity" of released hazardous substance, and describes notification regulations in the event a reportable quantity of hazardous substance is released.

(2) In addition to equipment inspection guidelines and equipment cleaning measures to prevent the introduction and/or spread of noxious weed material, contract specifications include federal regulations regarding sanitary facilities for staging areas and/or worker campsites, trash disposal requirements and other pertinent regulations.

(3) If undocumented cultural or paleontological resources are encountered during treatment activities, work at that specific location will be discontinued until field office staff can be contacted.

(4) The use of mechanical equipment will be discontinued at the discretion of the BLM during periods of precipitation when soil moisture content could increase the potential for deep ruts and/or excess soil compaction.

(5) The treatment area will be rested from grazing for a minimum of two growing seasons following seeding.

(6) All treatments will comply with the Conservation Measures as stated in 2.2 Alternative A (page 20) in the EA and the Biological Assessment (BA).

(7) Place buffers around wildlife corridors and drainages; leave a mosaic of the larger more mature old-growth trees that provide unique and irreplaceable ecological value for animal and plant habitat, genetic diversity and long-term climate records.

(8) Future projects within the analysis area will conduct a literature search for every undertaking. Class III surveys may or may not be conducted based on the findings, if no survey is recommended then 106 consultation would be undertaken with the Utah State Historic Preservation Office for concurrence of findings and recommendations. If no survey is conducted prior to the undertaking then an archaeologist would be present during implementation. In areas where mechanical treatment would take place an Archaeological Report (Class III) would be prepared, and information documenting the archaeological inventory and compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended, would be on file in the Canyon Country Fire Zone office. Sites identified and determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) would likely be avoided during the mechanical treatment portion of the project, unless treatment options are such that it would be beneficial to the archaeological resource to treat the vegetation on site.

PLAN CONFORMANCE AND CONSISTENCY:

The proposed action and alternatives have been reviewed and found to be in conformance with one or more of the following BLM Land Use Plans and the associated decision(s):

The Proposed Action would be in conformance with the Moab Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP), October 2008 (Moab RMP). The project would be in conformance with Moab RMP decisions:

- Page 58, FIRE-4: Hazardous fuels reduction treatments would be used to restore ecosystems; protect human, natural and cultural resources; and reduce the threat of wildfire to communities.
- Page 59, FIRE-9: The BLM would work together with partners and other affected groups and individuals to reduce risks to communities and to restore ecosystems.
- Page 60, FIRE-14: Fuels management activities outline in the FMP would be consistent with the resource goals and objectives contained in the RMP. To reduce hazards and to restore ecosystems, authorized fuels management actions include wildland fire use, prescribed fire, and mechanical, manual, chemical, biological, and seeding treatments.

- Page 82, REC-10: Provide public information concerning the prevention of the spread of invasive and exotic weeds, and about wildlife species and their habitats especially in riparian areas.
- Page 99, RIP-1: Manage riparian resources for PFC, which is described as the presence of adequate vegetation, landforms, or large woody debris, in accordance with the Utah Standards for Public Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Recreation Management for BLM Lands in Utah and with the Grazing Guidelines for Grazing Management.
- Page 100, RIP-3: Mitigation to reduce impacts to floodplains and riparian areas include (from Standards for Public Land Health and Guidelines for Recreation Management for BLM Lands in Utah and BLM Riparian Manual 1737): ... implement weed management stipulations and education to reduce spread of noxious weeds along stream corridors.
- Page 100, RIP-5: Limit activities in riparian areas, as necessary, to achieve and maintain PFC.
- Page 100, RIP-9: Continue to apply integrated species management to accomplish riparian restoration through biological, chemical, mechanical, and manual methods (e.g., tamarisk control, willow plantings).
- Page 101, RIP-16: Management strategies would be implemented to restore degraded riparian communities, protect natural flow requirements, protect water quality, and manage for year round flow.
- Page 102, SOL-WAT-5: Allow no surface occupancy and preclude surface-disturbing activities (see Appendix A) within 100-year floodplains, within 100 meters of a natural spring, or within public water reserves.
- Page 103, SOL-WAT-16: Manages uses to minimize and mitigate damage to soils.
- Page 103, SOL-WAT-17: Maintain and/or restore overall watershed health and reduce erosion, stream sedimentation, and salinization of water.
- Page 132, VEG-7: Utilize the techniques and methods for vegetation treatments identified in the Utah ROD for Vegetation Treatments using Herbicides on Bureau of Land Management Lands in Seventeen Western States (2007).
- Page 132, VEG-8: Control noxious weed species and prevent the infestation and spread of invasive species. Develop cooperating agreements with other Federal, State, local and private organizations to control invasive and noxious weed species.
- Page 132, VEG-9: Reduce Tamarisk and Russian olive where appropriate using allowable vegetation treatments. Restore riparian habitat to native willow and cottonwood communities.

- Page 137, WL-7: Prioritize the maintenance and/or improvement of lowland riparian, wetlands, and low and high desert scrub communities which are the four most important and used habitats types by migratory birds in the Moab Planning Area.
- Page 137, WL-8: Migratory Birds: Prevent the spread of invasive and non-native plants, especially cheatgrass, tamarisk, and Russian olive. Strive for a dense under story of native species in riparian areas with a reduction in tamarisk and improvement of cottonwood and willow regeneration.

Alternatives Considered: The No Action Alternative (Alternative B) was considered and analyzed but was not selected. With no treatment, continued noxious/invasive expansion would result in a greater wildfire hazard and ecosystem degradation than currently exists. No treatment would result in further expansion with a simultaneous decline in herbaceous native vegetation, productivity and diversity. Populations of plant species listed in Appendix E would go uncontrolled and further propagation and establishment of these invasive plants would occur as natural conditions warrant and outside influencing factors allow.

Rationale for Decision: The decision to authorize this important invasive species management plan has been made in consideration of the environmental impacts of the proposed action, as well as in consideration of impacts from not taking any action. While singular projects will not provide a significant contribution to regional or state-wide ecological conditions, it could enhance habitat/population connectivity through migratory corridors and improve habitat structure, forage, and stability in the general area by impeding the progress of noxious/invasive species. The project is a landscape-scale action directly involving approximately 2,856,082 acres of land within the MFO boundary that will benefit in the long term from a decreased invasive/noxious species expansion and improved ecosystem function.

The selected alternative will have both short-term adverse and long-term beneficial impacts to resources as described in the EA. Mitigating measures to reduce adverse impacts to cultural resources, fish and wildlife, sensitive plants and migrating birds were incorporated in the design of the action alternative. None of the environmental effects discussed in detail in the EA and associated appendices are considered significant, nor do the effects exceed those described in the Moab Field Office RMP FEIS. Although the selected alternative is designed specifically to reduce invasive/noxious species and improve ecosystem function and restore vegetative resilience through grass, forb and shrub establishment in the MFO, indirect beneficial impacts to public health and safety will result from the decreased chance of wildland fire and continued species spread to adjacent Wildland Urban Interface and recreational areas.

Section 7 Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) was initiated for the proposed project alternative with a conclusion in the BLM's Biological Assessment that implementation "may affect, [but] is not likely to adversely affect" the Mexican spotted owl, Southwestern willow flycatcher, yellow-billed cuckoo, Gunnison sage-grouse, Colorado pikeminnow, Bonytail chub, Humpback chub, Razorback sucker, California Condor and Jones cycladenia. USFWS also concluded that the proposed action will have a "no affect" to Navajo sedge. The USFWS concurred with this conclusion in its Biological Opinion on July 20, 2016.

The project conforms to the Moab Field Office RMP/DEIS management objectives specifying the use of a wide array of fuel treatments to treat invasive species and restore native vegetation. Authorized treatment activities are also aligned with the Grand County Master Plan, which recommends reducing invasive weeds and allowing native species to thrive. Section 9.3.11 of the Grand County Scenic Byways Corridor Management Plan recommends collaboration with partners to restore the structure and function of ecosystems within byway corridors that have been damaged by tamarisk and Russian olive infestations.

The proposed action alternative and no action alternative are also consistent with other federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and plans listed in Section 1.6 of the EA.

During preparation of the EA, the public was notified of the proposed action by posting on the ePlanning website on July 2, 2015. Press releases for a public scoping meeting occurring on July 8, 2015 were published in the Times Independent and Moab Sun News on July 2, 2015 to address any public concerns and solicit input for the project need and design. In addition to press releases, emails were sent out to approximately thirty people soliciting them to attend the scoping meeting. The EA was posted on the ePlanning website on April 4, 2016 for 15 day public comment and review. An unsigned FONSI with a complete copy of the EA and maps was made available to the public on May 21, 2015. A 15 day public comment period did not receive any letters from the interested public. Public comments from the scoping were used in the development of the EA and are part of the administrative record.

Protest/Appeal Language: This decision is subject to administrative appeal. Within 30 days of receipt of this decision, parties who are adversely affected and believe it is incorrect have the right to appeal to the Department of the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with regulations at 43 CFR 4.4. Appellants must follow procedures outlined in the form, "Information on Taking Appeals to the Board of Land Appeals." An appeal should be in writing and specify the reasons, clearly and concisely, as to why the decision is in error. Appellants are requested to supply this office with a copy of the Statement of Reasons.

This wildfire management decision is issued under 43 CFR Part 5003.1 and is effective immediately. The BLM has made the determination that vegetation, soil, or other resources on the public lands are at substantial risk of wildfire due to drought, fuels buildup, or other reasons, or at immediate risk of erosion or other damage due to wildfire. Thus, notwithstanding the provisions of 43 CFR 4.21(a)(1), filing a notice of appeal under 43 CFR Part 4 does not automatically suspend the effect of the decision. Appeal of this decision may be made to the Interior Board of Land Appeals in accordance with 43 CFR 4.410. The Interior Board of Land Appeals must decide an appeal of this decision within 60 days after all pleadings have been filed, and within 180 days after the appeal was filed as contained in 43 CFR 4.416.


Christina Pryci
Field Manager, Acting
Authorized Officer


August 30, 2016
Date

